

EXTRACTS

FROM

AN ADDRESS

TO THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

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ADDRESS

TO

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

DEAR FRIENDS: In the first place, let me put you in mind of the nature and importance of that religious profession, we, as a Society, are making among men ; which I believe would be found to be above that of every other society of professing Christians—to wit, the absolute necessity of our living, acting, and moving in all our civil as well as religious engagements, under the influence and government of the Spirit of Christ Jesus our Lord and Lawgiver ; that “ whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, God the Father may in all things be glorified.”

This, my friends, is the chief corner-stone of our building, our fundamental principle ; therefore, let us consider how far the general tenour of our conduct corresponds therewith, how far we are each endeavouring earnestly to be found, in all things, conformable to the example and precepts of the great and holy Pattern of all Christian perfection, of Him who has trod the path of temptation and trial before us, but who rejected every snare of the enemy. If this should not be the case with us, is there not a danger of our becoming to others, who, from our exalted profession, may be looking to us for example and encouragement in the way to the heavenly Canaan, like the evil spies unto the children of Israel formerly ; or that our examples may prove as lets and hindrances to such, instead of helps to press through difficulties and discouragements towards the mark for the prize—which is, “ Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy ; ” “ Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect ? ”

Let us remember, however, we may be at peace with ourselves by thus professing ; but not doing the very best in our power to attain this perfect stature of the Christian, we are but branding ourselves in the estimation of the more serious and thinking part of the community with the odious character of hypocrites ; neither do I believe that we escape at all times the like censure from the more unthinking and irreligious part. And let us remember, that the sad effects of thus dissembling

will not end here ; for if this conduct be persisted in, we must expect to incur the woe pronounced by our blessed Lord. " Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ; for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men ; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in." For if every one that nameth the name of Christ is to depart from iniquity, is it not obligatory on the part of such as make the high and holy profession we do, to endeavour to attain to such a state of purity of conduct and converse among men ?

I believe our first Friends were raised up as a people, to bear testimony to the sufficiency of that pure principle of light and life in all mankind, which would direct them in the way to the heavenly Canaan, and strengthen them to walk therein. They confirmed the truth of their testimony by the general tenour of their conduct, giving ample proof to by-standers, that, through submission to its holy appearance in their hearts, they were mercifully redeemed from the world and its spirit, not only from its pleasures, but also from its treasures, and were enabled to count all things appertaining to this life but as dross and as dung, so that they might win Christ. Hereby they became as an ensign to the nations, for the fame of them spread far and wide : they became instrumental in the Divine Hand to gather souls unto God, and had to proclaim the glad tidings of the church being added unto daily. But alas, my friends ! how is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed ! how is the love of God, and that humility and self-denial so manifest in them, now, by too many amongst us, turned into the love of other things, such as gold and silver, and a desire to make an appearance of greatness in the world.

Do not these things, my friends, loudly call upon us, as a religious body, making a high profession, to be willing, each one for himself, to enter timely into the closet of the heart, and seek for Divine help to shut to the door thereof against carnal reasoning, great natural acquirements, and love of the world, which there is cause to fear have overpowered the better judgment of many among us. Hereby, as we become willing to stand open to Divine conviction, we may be favoured each one to see in what manner, and how far, we may have contributed to this sorrowful declension, and timely amend our ways and our doings ; seeing we are yet mercifully followed, both immediately by the Great Head of the church, and instrumentally, with line upon line, precept upon precept. O, how applicable to His dealings, as respects our Society, is the language of the Most High, formerly uttered, " How shall I give

thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ? how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as Zeboim ? Mine heart is turned within me ; my repentings are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger ; I will not return to destroy Ephraim ; for I am God and not man ; the Holy One in the midst of thee : and I will not enter into the city." May we no longer be found walking unworthy of these His multiplied mercies, but be prevailed upon to return to the good old ways, that we also may be found in those paths of holiness of life and conversation, in which our forefathers walked, under sore travail of mind and great suffering of body, and waste of outward substance, through persecutions. Oh ! let us no longer be found trampling, as it were, upon their testimony, by slighting the many great and precious privileges of this day of outward ease, we who are uninterruptedly eating the fruit of the vineyards and oliveyards we never planted, but which they were made instrumental to plant for us ; thus making the way easy to us, as it now is, to assemble for the purpose of Divine worship, for transacting Society concerns, and for the support of our various religious testimonies.

How many among us are pursuing their worldly concerns, as if they counted gain godliness, and not, as must be the case with the true disciples and followers of Christ, godliness with contentment to be the greatest riches, proclaiming in the language of conduct, that all is fish that comes to their net, regarding neither quantity nor quality, so there be a prospect of a good profit attached to it. O, these professing worldlings, who say, they are Jews and are not, but whose fruits testify they are of the synagogue of satan, I have been persuaded, have been the greatest enemies to the spreading of our religious principles and the enlargement of our borders ; those who maintain an uniform, consistent warfare against the Babylonish garment, but with all their might grasp at the wedge of gold, and aim at making a splendid appearance in their way of living. I believe no character is more odious in the estimation of those termed libertines, than these, especially where it is known they are taking an active part in Society concerns. For in neighbourhoods where meetings are held, it is pretty generally known by those out of the Society, who are what the world calls our pillars ; though it cannot be doubted, that such must at times prove stumbling-blocks to honest inquirers after Zion, and be instrumental in turning the blind out of the right way of the Lord.

I believe I am safe in saying, I have not been wanting at times in endeavouring to cast a veil of charity over the con-

duct of some of my friends, who it is evident have in this way become satan's bond-slaves, and my heart is made sad on their account : I have an assurance, that whatsoever our temptations and besetments may be, if we are but in good earnest, willing to resist and overcome them, he that covets great trade, great riches, and to make a figure in the world, as well as he that takes strong drink, will experience a way, a sure and certain way, to be cast up in due time by the Lord, for his escape from this otherwise impassable gulf between him and an eternal resting-place with the righteous. For the self-same Divine principle of light and life, which our worthy forefathers believed in, followed, and were actuated by, is still with us, as the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, is still experienced by those who wait for it, and found by such as submit to its government, which is an all-regulating principle, subduing every inordinate affection and disposition.

How remarkably was this manifest in the members of our Society in the beginning ; until the enemy was permitted to try us with the bait, which has not failed to take with some of all classes in society—riches and worldly prosperity. In proportion as the mind has been let out, and desires increased after these, it has become indifferent as to consequences ; neither fearing the overcharge of quantity, nor properly regarding the quality of business. Happy had it been for many, had they willingly and timely yielded to those Divine intimations ; for I believe none ever turned aside from the path of safety totally ignorant thereof, but that in the beginning of their erring and straying, the witness for God followed them, and at times smote them : but if we disregard its invitations and secret motions, it is then most just on the part of Almighty God, to leave us to the power and insinuations of satan ; the god of this world, who rules in the hearts of the children of disobedience. But even while thus promoting the cause of the evil one, such may continue to make a fair show in the flesh, as to a profession of religion, and be very tenacious respecting some externals, as were the Pharisees—things comparable to the mint, anise and cummin, and in which satan will not oppose them, so long as they rest therewith satisfied, and continue to rebel against the light, refusing to submit to the heart-cleansing operation of God's word and power, which only can effectually cleanse the inside of the cup and the platter.

Those who covet an evil covetousness, must expect to possess leanness of soul ; the sorrowful consequences of which will be unfruitfulness towards God, which although it may appear to be very slow in its gradations, yet such may rest

assured, that it will take place, whatever they may have known aforetime of an enlargement of heart towards him and his cause. Some among us, not satisfied when a kind Providence has so favoured them, as that there has been an ample supply from their present business for basket and store, to satisfy their thirst of more, have infringed upon the rights and privileges of others, adding one fresh business to another. How does such a mode of procedure comport with a people professing, as we do, to be dead to the world, and alive unto Him, whose apostle declared, "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him?" From whence proceeds this conduct? Let the just witness tell us, my friends; and may it arouse us before it be too late! Let such no longer continue to say, "To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain;" whereas they know not what shall be on the morrow: but let them be willing to yield to the restraining influence of God's word and power.

Consider from whence this determination proceeds, which many among us appear to have made; this willingness to sacrifice every thing that should be nearest and dearest to them, in order to add ten thousand to ten thousand, and twenty thousand to twenty thousand, and double and treble it again and again, if possible. Let these things speak for themselves: can they proceed from any other disposition than the love of the world? O, let such consider if the apostle's declaration be not true as to them, that the love of the Father is not in them. For many years I have esteemed it a reproach to such a Society of professing Christians as we are, when any of our members have been summoned from works to rewards, and have left behind them such large sums of money of their own accumulation. O what a cloud has it brought over their very best actions, however conspicuous they may have stood in society! O the sorrowful feelings I have been dipped into at times on the account of such!—language fails me to set them forth. It is painful for me thus to expose myself on this sorrowful subject, for such I have often experienced it to be; but I believe that, if my feeble efforts be accepted as a peace-offering, that which appears to be the whole counsel must be imparted.

Some have replied, when remonstrated with on these subjects, that they are at a loss to define the word "enough;" but this difficulty, I am of the mind, rests with themselves: in the first place, through an unwillingness to have their wants circumscribed by that power which is from above; and in the

next, for want of a sincere desire to have this word defined for them, by that wisdom which is as competent to direct in this as in any other important step of life. As it is a duty we owe to the body, to make suitable provision for its comfort and convenience, especially for old age, that we may rather be helpful to others than require their help: so likewise to put our children in the way to get their living by moderate industry, and provide for such of them as may not be in a capacity to help themselves: when a kind Providence has entrusted to us so much as may answer these purposes, if after this there remains a disposition to accumulate, then I believe we are violating that command of the Divine Master, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," and we are giving full proof where our hearts are: not that I apprehend it would be better for all such who have thus attained, to quit their trades and occupations; because some may be more in the way of their duty in continuing to pursue them honourably; when, besides introducing deserving persons as their successors, they may be the means of helping those who are not able to help themselves, with which description of persons the world abounds, such as the widows and the fatherless, and the infirm, who frequently are obliged to labour under extreme pain and suffering; but there must be no adding to the "enough," lest that enough which has been mercifully dispensed, be taken away again.

I am now under the necessity of claiming your attention, my dear sisters, in order that you may do your part in facilitating the escape of your husbands and parents from the troubled waters and sunk rocks of commercial difficulty, which the keen eye of human policy is so often unable to discover; for with you generally rests the management of household affairs: it is also principally for the supply of these that the labouring oar is kept tugging. You must be willing mothers and children, to examine closely the mode and circumstances of your expenditure, with a mind made up to relieve, as far as in you lies, the head of the family, who may have both wind and tide to contend with. Search your houses, search your tables, search your garments; and where any expense can be spared without lessening your real comforts, seek for holy help to rid the vessel of it. I am well aware it will require holy help to take such steps; but this I am assured will not be wanting if sought after in a proper disposition of mind. And we shall find that those things which have been sacrificed, being calculated only to gratify the vain mind in ourselves and others, and pamper a depraved appetite, had not the effect

of adding real comfort to our hearts. Regard not the world's dread laugh, but set your intimates and neighbours this salutary example; show them the way to live well at little expense; an example I believe we are called upon in a peculiar manner to be holding up.

And, Friends, you that are of ability of body, learn to wait more upon yourselves, and bring your children to do the like: I find I am never better waited on, than when I wait upon myself. Teach your children industry and a well-regulated economy; I fear there is too much need in the present day to press this wholesome practice; for next to a truly pious example, you cannot bestow upon your children a better portion. This appears to have been much the case with our first Friends; and it had been better for many of our youth, had their parents trod more in the footsteps of these. Labour is a part of the penance enjoined by the fall, "By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou get thy bread." This sentence pronounced upon Adam descends to all his posterity. Suitable employment under the regulating influence of an all-wise Creator, is salutary both for mind and body, and qualifies us the better to feel for, and proportion labour, to those who may be placed under us. It may even prove a secondary means of keeping our nature under subjection, which we cannot be ignorant is corrupt, and requires much subduing; something to check its impetuosity, and bear rule in all our actions. There is yet another precious advantage results from bringing up children in habits of well-regulated industry and economy; little business will then be found sufficient to bring up a family reputably, when our wants are confined to real comforts and conveniences, which Truth allows, as far as ever our circumstances will warrant them.

When we are content to move in this humble sphere, we are prepared the better to meet such reverses as may come upon us. Let none among us say in his heart, I am out of the reach of reverses, because none are out of the reach of them; for however variously our outward substance may be secured, all sublunary things are unstable as the waters; and various as may be our resources, every supply may be cut off; the Philistines may be permitted to stop up all the wells which we have dug for ourselves and our children. The Most High may permit his little army to enter into our vineyards and oliveyards, and strip us of all, without power on our part to prevent the devastation; for what the palmer-worm leaves, the canker-worm may eat; and what the canker-worm leaves, the caterpillar may so destroy that not the least vestige of our

once greenness and greatness may remain. This has been the case with many within my memory. The crafty have been so taken in their own craftiness, and the lofty so brought down from their seats, and the men of low degree exalted, that he who was the servant has become the master of his once master, and even his master's children have served his children. What has been may be again: for thus has the All-wise Disposer, to whom belong the cattle of a thousand hills and every visible thing, for nothing is mine or thine any longer than he sees meet we should possess it, evinced his sovereignty and power to humble his creature man; convincing him thus of the great uncertainty of all visible things. And may these turnings and overturnings which we hear of, and some more keenly feel the smart of, in commercial concerns and in families, prove the means of stimulating us to leave things that are behind, all of which are perishing, and press forward to those which are before, which are eternal.

I am afraid, my dear sisters, to close this subject without adding another hint, as essential to our being the better able to keep our family expenditure within its proper bounds; having myself experienced its salutary effects, when I had a numerous family around me. It is, to determine to purchase with ready money the various articles consumed for family use, and that we resolve to perform this, however mortifying it may prove, by depriving us of many things the natural disposition may crave in ourselves and children. I believe great advantage will be found to result from such a practice, both to parents and children, more particularly to such as at times feel themselves straitened, to carry on their business reputably. For when these difficulties are felt by an honest mind, it becomes obligatory on such, if they get through them, closely to inspect the manner of their expenditure, and this will afford an opportunity of timely checking any unnecessary expense that may have crept into the family. But when things for family consumption are mostly, if not all, had upon credit, this opens a wide door both for parents and children to greater indifference, both as respects expediency and cost, than Truth at all justifies; and the children of such parents are in danger of being brought up ignorant of the real use or value of property. When numbering my blessings, I esteem this as not one of the least that my heavenly Father has bestowed upon me, that he kept me in a little way of business, and a care to keep my family expenses within proper bounds, and taught me the lesson of contentment with little things; because now I am advanced in life, I am satisfied I escaped manifold perplex-

ities, which would have been at this time my attendants, had I sought after greater things as to this world. The purchasing goods for family consumption on credit, often proves a serious inconvenience to those on whom such are depending for their supplies, especially if they are not before-hand in the world; for it too frequently proves that such purchasers are not very ready to make payment in due time, and when this is the case, are they doing as they would be done by?

I want us more frequently to recur to that which we are making profession of, and as frequently compare our practice therewith, bringing all our deeds to that light, by which, in a future day, they will be judged; for I cannot refrain from expressing a jealousy, that too many amongst us are swerving into this dangerous track of the world. One of the diadems with which our first Friends were decked—one of the many jewels that shone in their character, and adorned their profession, was the care they manifested to have nothing but what they could well pay for; so that should reverses come, from the many perils they were in various ways liable to, none might be losers by them. This, in due time, with an uniform, consistent, upright conduct in other respects, procured for them that confidence in the minds of all ranks, and that respect which they so long maintained. I am not able to close this subject without entreating such, to whom these remarks may apply, not to set light by them. Look seriously at the subject, and make a stand, and hold up your testimony by example, against this baneful practice, for so I doubt not it has been to thousands, and the inlet to those embarrassments that have at last overtaken them. If we are willing to be found thus standing in our proper allotment, we may prove in a degree instrumental, in the Divine hand, to check that torrent of evil, which so sorrowfully pervades all classes: for the practice has overspread the nation of supporting an expensive manner of living upon credit, which, if not timely checked, there is reason to fear may contribute, amongst other evil practices, to work its ruin. We have stood high as a religious society in the esteem of others, for nearly a century and a half, in regard to honesty, integrity, and an exemplary conduct. Can we with truth say, we believe we have been rising higher in this respect, of later years? I fear this has not been the case; but that the many sorrowful failures, the multiplied instances of want of punctuality that have of late years occurred among us, with various departures in other respects from our well-known principles, have given a severe shock to that confidence in us, which once had place in the public mind.

The door has of late been set open much wider than was the experience of our first Friends, for the members of our Society to associate with those of other religious professions, in the management of the various institutions for benevolent purposes that are on foot. Let us be careful, that this does not lead us to assimilate ourselves to the world. The world hated our first Friends, because they maintained a faithful protest against its spirit, its maxims and manners ; but in proportion as we put away from us the weapons of the Christian's warfare, and join in league with the world, a wider door of admittance into all companies and all societies will be opened to us. Thus we have, indeed, occasion to look well to our steppings and standing ; remembering, that so far as we join ourselves to the world in any respect, we shall be condemned with the world. "If ye were of the world," said our blessed Lord to his immediate followers, "the world would love its own ; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

In order that we may not further forfeit the confidence of the public, but regain that which we may have lost, let me again repeat the caution, that by others' harms we may take warning ; and by our future conduct give proof of our belief in this incontrovertible truth, that a man's life, or the true enjoyment of it, consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Let us learn that essential lesson of contentment with little things as to this world, remembering that He, whom we profess to take for our leader, declared respecting himself, although Lord of the whole world, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," so void was he of any earthly inheritance. It was the exhortation of the prophet to Baruch, the son of Neriah, "Seekest thou great things for thyself ? seek them not ; for behold I will bring evil upon all flesh, saith the Lord ; but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey, in all places whither thou goest." Whilst then we are engaged to circulate more generally, among mankind at large, publications explanatory of our religious principles, and religious tracts, may we give proof, in the first place, of their happy effects upon our minds ; for example will do more than precept,—actions will speak louder than words ; so shall we each one become a preacher of righteousness, that cannot fail to reach to the pure witness in the minds of others.

Let us all retire to our tents ; for if I am not mistaken, such are the signs of the times, that they loudly call upon us so to do, and there closely to keep. The Lord is this tent,

unto which the true Israel of God must flee to be safe ; and as there is thus an abiding in him, who is the munition of rocks, should the potsherds of the earth begin to smite one against another, such will be preserved from smiting with them, in word or deed, and escape that danger which will more or less follow those who are found so meddling ; and that perturbation of mind, that instability of confidence and want of support, under the various probations that may, in unerring wisdom, be permitted to overtake, which ever was and will be, the case of those who make flesh their arm.

And, Friends, let us not dare to meddle with political matters, but renewedly seek for holy help to starve that disposition so prevalent in us to be meddling therewith. Endeavour to keep that ear closed, which will be itching to hear the news of the day, and what is going forward in the political circles. I have found, that if we suffer our minds to be agitated with political matters, our dependence becomes diverted, by little and little, from the true centre and place of safety, where perfect peace is experienced, though the world and all around us may speak trouble. Such as have this dependence will know it to be a truth fulfilled in their own individual experience, that "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed ; but abideth for ever ;" and that, "as the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever."

I must now conclude, with expressing the earnest solicitude I feel, that we may each of us be found willing to unite with that all-sufficient help, which, I believe, yet waits our acceptance ; and suffer it so to operate in and upon us, that we may become a people wholly separated in heart and mind, love and affection, from everything that has a tendency to dim our brightness, to prevent us from being as lights in the world ; and be clothed with those beautiful garments, which so adorned our worthy ancestors—humility, self-denial, and an entire dedication of heart to the work and service of our God ; a disposition truly characteristic of the disciples of him, who declared, " My kingdom is not of this world :" and thus may the enemy no longer be permitted to rob and spoil us, but the language go forth respecting us, " Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee, O people ; saved by the Lord."

THOMAS SHILLITOE.

Hitchin, 1st of Eleventh
month, 1820.